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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001549

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: MORE SORDID TALES OF PRISON LIFE FOR POLITICAL
DETAINEES

REF: A. RANGOON 1499 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. RANGOON 1488

[1](#)C. RANGOON 1530

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: U Kyaw Hsan, a 72 year-old NLD MP-elect released on November 19 after spending nine of the previous twelve years at Insein Prison, is already back on the job. Our recent encounter with this elderly but energetic activist revealed additional evidence that the regime's primary tool against political detainees is not necessarily physical torture, but taxing solitary confinement. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) U Kyaw Hsan, an NLD MP-elect from Sagaing Division who emerged from Insein Prison on November 19 (ref B), recently approached us while we were meeting with NLD leaders (ref C). The 72 year-old party leader (aka Kyaw Sann), who retired in 1986 as a Lt Colonel in the Burmese Army, had spent nine of the previous twelve years as a political prisoner.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Like some other recently released political prisoners (ref A), Kyaw Hsan was freed without conditions. Prison officials simply notified him of the SPDC's November 18 order regarding "irregularities" of the disbanded National Intelligence Bureau and drove him home in a prison sedan. He noted that authorities had actually issued him release papers in March 2002, but refused to set him free, cruelly prolonging his detention indefinitely under Section 10(a) of the 1975 "Law to Safeguard the State Against the Dangers of Subversive Elements."

[1](#)4. (SBU) Kyaw Hsan recounted that in January 1992 the then-SLORC regime ordered his arrest under Section 5(j) of the Emergency Provisional Act for having supported the Nobel Peace Prize to Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) and for protesting ASSK's forced removal from the NLD's Central Executive Committee. The regime released Kyaw Hsan in February 1995 after three years at Insein Prison, but rearrested him in September 1998 to serve the remainder of a ten-year term, alleging that he had renewed his "illegal" political activities.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Kyaw Hsan recounted how he had spent six lonely and difficult years in solitary confinement. He said that he was not physically tortured while at Insein Prison, but noted that the isolation was brutal. During his solitary confinement, his only contact with other human beings was twice monthly family visits; however, he was separated from family members by thick glass and ten-feet of space and their conversations were recorded by prison officials.

[1](#)6. (SBU) During his first stint at Insein Prison, Kyaw Hsan was housed in an annex for political prisoners and other "special" detainees. However, his second and longer prison stay was spent in a special ward for political detainees where he, and other prisoners, were confined inside isolated cells. He said that authorities never allowed the political prisoners to talk with, or to see, each other. The political prisoners only knew that they were not alone at Insein when they were grouped together once every six months for visits from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In addition, Kyaw Hsan also had visits from UN human rights envoy Pinheiro (twice) and representatives from Amnesty International (once) during his 1998-2004 incarceration.

[1](#)7. (C) Kyaw Hsan appeared to us to be in excellent physical health and in high good spirits, joking that, with little to do in prison but read religious materials, he had counted his detention one minute at a time, "for nine years, two months, 28 days, and several hours." He said he had survived his "experience in Hell" through meditation and by virtue of receiving regular food deliveries from family members. He also expressed gratitude for support from the international community, "especially the United States," observing that pressure and sanctions had also helped in keeping him alive.

[1](#)8. (C) Comment: Our encounter with U Kyaw Hsan took place, surprisingly, at NLD headquarters in Rangoon. Barely days out of his lengthy and difficult prison stint, the elderly but energetic party leader was back on the job, decked out in full NLD regalia. "The last I knew," he declared, "I was still the NLD division leader for Sagaing and I've got work

to do." Proving his point, he added in his official capacity that the party continued to encourage the United States and others to bring the Burma question before the UN Security Council. "I know that the NLD must labor inside the country if democracy is going to flourish in Burma", he said, "but we also need international support." End Comment.
MARTINEZ